

The WhiteCane

The magazine of the Iowa Department for the Blind

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Changing attitudes and influencing lives

The evolution of audio magazines

Preparing for a successful future with transition services

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|from the editor

The Department for the Blind has a rich and complex history. As with any history you read, there are events that can produce an outcome no one saw coming. Such an event happened in Iowa. Within this issue you'll discover how the long, white cane came to Iowa and changed lives.

Inside you'll learn how the cane is an intrinsic part of the Department's philosophy and programs; read about how the IL program changed one woman's life; and discover how the library is stepping into the future.

This issue of *The White Cane* will illustrate not only how the cane went from a basic mobility tool to a symbol of independence, but how the cane is a valuable part of the Department's past, present and future.

— **Meredith Ferguson, Editor**

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In December, I retired my Seeing Eye Dog Korbin after seven years of excellent partnership.

Korbin was ready to retire, but I am not. So I flew to New Jersey and over a period of three weeks trained with my new guide dog, Jimi.

I have partnered with a Seeing Eye dog since I graduated from high school, and for me, using a guide dog is as natural and imperative as walking. However, here at the IDB, our emphasis in training is on the long white cane.

The cane is the basic mobility tool every blind and visually impaired person needs to travel safely and independently. Without the solid mobility skills learned with the long white cane, those who choose to use a dog guide are not equipped to be successful.

Using the dog guide requires all of the basic mobility skills learned with the cane, plus a complex of new skills involving not only the actual work with a dog, but also the care, feeding and management of a valued working animal.

The majority of blind people don't choose to take on that challenge and can do the things they want using a cane.

Whether to use a cane or a dog is a highly personal choice, but the important factor is that the basic mobility skills with the cane must come first.

In this issue, you will see what makes the Iowa Cane an effective mobility tool, and you will discover how, with the cane in hand, blind Iowans have recaptured their independence and moved forward with their lives.



Sincerely,
Karen Keninger

The Iowa Cane

Once a basic mobility tool, now a sign of independence.



Pictured is an example of a “homemade” cane; a wooden walking stick that was later painted white and fitted with a metal tip. It has a dark wood handle and is 36 inches long. It is shown alongside the modern Iowa Cane (58 inches long) for comparison.

By Karen Keninger
IDB Director

The long white cane is both a practical tool and a symbol of independence. Simply put, through the use of the cane, a person with limited or no vision can go safely and independently where and when she wants to go.

The cane is a very efficient tool. The user holds the cane in the center of her body, tip on the ground. She arcs it back and forth as she walks, tapping it gently on each side of her path. This way, she can locate and avoid obstacles. She can move safely and confidently down the sidewalk, up and down stairs and escalators, in and through stores and businesses, on trains, planes and busses, and even on country roads and hiking paths.

The long white cane also symbolizes two characteristics of its user—blindness and independence. At first glance, these two aspects seem to be incompatible.

How can you be blind and independent at the same time? But over 50 years of experience has proven that with the proper tools, training and opportunities, thousands of blind people—canes in hand—have claimed both

their independence and their lives. The long white cane has evolved over centuries from a simple wooden stick to a precisely designed and highly effective travel tool.

The IDB recommends the Iowa Cane, which staff use in training clients. The Cadillac of canes, it has four distinguishing features—its fabrication, length, handle, and tip.



The Telescoping Cane (pictured above) is an example of the different types of canes available. Some people prefer to use this type of cane because it can collapse into a smaller size, making it easier to store.

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The cane is made of a length of sturdy, somewhat flexible fiberglass. Lighter than wood and more flexible than aluminum, the fiberglass allows vibrations to travel through the shaft, providing valuable feedback to the user each time it is tapped.

The length of the cane is important. Each user's cane is sized to the individual's height and walking speed. Generally, the top of the cane should reach just below the person's chin, although some people prefer it to be as tall as they are. Arcing a long cane provides the blind person with sufficient time to respond appropriately to stairs, street crossings, obstacles, and other changes in the path. It extends the user's view of the environment to the full length of the cane.

The handle of the Iowa Cane is straight, smooth, and green. With a straight smooth handle, the user can grip and manipulate the cane properly. Older-style canes--and even some newer models--still have a crooked handle, which tends to get in the way.

The tip of the Iowa Cane is especially important. Actually manufactured to serve as a chair glide, it is a flat, round metal disk attached to the

end of the cane by a rubber fitting.

The shape of the tip allows it to glide smoothly across many surfaces and to resist getting stuck in cracks or grass. And the metal provides a distinct sound each time it taps the ground, which can be used to identify the surface. In addition, tapping the cane also provides valuable audio feedback in the form of echoes which, with practice, can be used to locate doorways, obstacles, and other changes in the surroundings. The tip can be replaced easily when it wears out. People often resist carrying a white cane because of the unambiguous identification it provides as a person with severe vision loss.

Unfortunately, oftentimes, a person's attempt to hide vision loss results in other people making some less flatter



Kenneth Jernigan, a former director, and an Orientation Center student (pictured above) demonstrate how to use the long white cane. When used properly, the "Iowa Cane" makes travel safe and more efficient.

ing assumptions about them. One fellow told me he started using a cane when he realized that people in his town had, for a long time, assumed he was always drunk. With his cane in hand, he signaled to people what the issue really was and at the same time

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began to navigate his world with much more grace and ease.

Other blind or visually impaired individuals have had similar experiences. Once they start to use their canes, they come to enjoy their new-found freedom and independence. They go to places they hesitated to go before, and they feel more comfortable asking for assistance in a store or restaurant. We often hear them say, “Why did I wait so long?” ♦



Pictured above are two cane travelers on a walking bridge in Des Moines. With the proper tools and training, persons dealing with significant vision loss can build confidence and reclaim their independence.

Orientation Students Give Back To Their Community



Hilary and Kate (pictured above), two Orientation students, experience some hands-on learning while holding a turtle and enjoying their time at a nature center.

Knowing they can get where they want to go, students from the Iowa Department for the Blind's Adult Orientation and Adjustment Center enjoy numerous activities. Students learn that blindness doesn't have to stop them from learning more about their environment.

Part of the learning experience includes giving back to their local communities. This fall students combined skills learned in Travel and in Home Economics to prepare and serve a meal to homeless youth. Currently they are in the process of raising funds for “Toys for Kids.”

Changing Attitudes and Influencing Lives

By Barb Weigel
IL Project Specialist

The Independent Living (IL) program has been providing services to lowans with vision loss since 1980. It started with a project director, a secretary, a library assistant, and four independent living teachers. The program's primary purpose was to help blind and visually impaired lowans live independent and productive lives, and the goal was to serve 400 individuals a year.

IL primarily serves individuals who, due to age, health limitations or co-disabilities, do not wish to pursue paid employment.

Today, the Independent Living program consists of a program director, eight Independent Living Teachers, two Project Specialists and a secretary, and the program serves about 950 individuals per year.

Throughout the program's 30 years many things have evolved over time, and the IL team works hard to meet the ever-changing needs of the people it serves. Not only are people living longer, but there are more community resources and housing op-

tions (e.g. assisted living facilities) available to help individuals live life on their own terms and as independently as possible.

In the 80s, IL teachers used to travel throughout the state by bus. Today, hired drivers and Department issued vehicles are the chosen methods of transportation. Teachers used to assist individuals with learning to use typewriters and today they teach computers. Rotary phones have been replaced with cell phones. Library services have gone from records to cassettes and now digital.

There are also electronic labeling devices, a talking bill identifier to distinguish a five dollar bill from a twenty, a color identifier to determine the colors of your clothing, and more. But with all these changes, the basic techniques used over the past 30 years still remain effective.

The IL teacher's role not only includes teaching those techniques but also educating clients on their choices and helping them implement the technique of choice. After 30 years in play, this formula still works and continues to



Pictured here is Kathryn Hovey at her home in Charles City. She's been receiving IL services from the IDB since 2010.

help individuals reclaim their independence, allowing us to bring to you stories like Kathryn's.

Kathryn's Story

In November, Kathryn Hovey of Charles City began receiving IL services after her eye doctor encouraged her to contact IDB. Looking back, she says IDB services have been "a Godsend."

Although Kathryn's vision loss began in the late 1980s, it didn't significantly impact her daily functioning until a few years ago. She is a self-proclaimed busybody and with her increasing vision

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loss, she stopped using the stove and doing her beloved crafts. She started relying on others for meals, began having trouble reading her mail, couldn't read her bank statements or balance her checkbook, struggled to plug in her coffee pot and more. "It got to be very frustrating."


Through IDB services, Kathryn has learned "to perform a lot of duties...

[things] I don't have to do, but I want to do. And I want to say 'I can do!'" She now uses bumps to set her oven, washer, thermostat and other appliances by touch. She has labeled her food items so she can identify them independently, has learned to fold her money and identify coins, uses talking time pieces, plugs her coffee pot in by touch, is doing her crafts again and much more.

Possibly the biggest change in Kathryn is her attitude. Before IDB services, she admits "I was a grouch. I was feeling a bit sorry for myself. I felt like I was doomed." When Kathryn's eye doctor explained there are millions of people with Macular Degeneration and that each person has to cope with it in their

own way, her attitude began to change. She thought, "I have to take the cards I am dealt and play them the best way I know how" and she took a proactive approach to vision loss.

At our first meeting, I remember Kathryn being soft spoken and reserved. She didn't have much emotion during conversations. About six months later, that all changed.

The things you think
are mission impossible
are not if you really
want to do it.

Kathryn is now full of smiles and excitement. She laughs, jokes, and is eager to tell about all the things she's done since our last visit. "The things you think are mission impossible are not if you really want to do it." She also says, "I appreciate all the help I have gotten through the Iowa Department for the Blind. I highly recommend them."

One of Kathryn's favorite poems is "I Can" and she refers to it often. She has come a long way in a few short

months and her attitude and determination play a big part in where she is today. She is determined to do what she wants to do and doesn't let her vision loss stop her. If she has a problem, she figures out a solution.

I Can

By Mari Evans

I can be anything.

I can do anything.

I can think anything

Big or tall or high or low

Wide or narrow,

fast or slow.

Because I can

And I want to!

The Iowa Department for the Blind's Independent Living (IL) program provides in-home and community-based services to support Iowans living with vision loss. For more information, call (800) 362-2587 or e-mail barb.weigel@blind.state.ia.us ♦

Iowa: A State of Firsts in Vocational Rehabilitation

By Betty Hansen
Deaf-Blind Specialist

Choices. Something many of us take for granted is the ability to choose what we do with our lives; whether it's going to school, learning a trade, or being a stay-at-home spouse/parent. Choosing a career because it's what we want to pursue, not because it's the only available option, wasn't always possible for the blind. Today many more doors are open to the blind because a few refused to accept limitations. Iowa was ground-zero for a new program that broke down these barriers and expanded employment opportunities for the blind.

For years, the prevailing approach towards blindness was something known as "custodialism." Blind people were cared for by sighted people who helped them with their daily tasks, such as cooking and cleaning. Special homes and workshops were set up, and appropriate jobs were designated. "Blind trades," as they were called, included rug weaving, sewing, and chair caning. These trades were

taught from 1925 to 1958 by the Iowa Commission for the Blind, as well as other agencies for the blind across the nation. This caretaker attitude, however, was soon challenged and the Commission became a new training ground.

In 1958, there was a dramatic shift in service delivery when the agency changed its philosophy. The reha-

“It soon became apparent that limiting blind people to trade-skills was a thing of the past.”

bilitation program became one based upon a "positive" philosophy of blindness; a philosophy based on the belief that blindness is just another characteristic. If properly taught alternative techniques (Braille, cane travel, etc.), persons living with blindness could do many of the same tasks as a person with sight.

After proper training, the next step was getting blind people out into the work-

ing world. The Commission maintained rehabilitation wasn't finished until a blind person was employed; preferably in a career of their choosing. To better meet the needs of blind Iowans seeking employment, a new program was established.

Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) was a consumer based service, where the blind person's choices and decisions

about their own future became the priority. It soon became apparent that limiting blind people to trade-skills was a thing of the

past.

By 1961, the vocational rehabilitation program was pointed directly toward competitive employment. Blind people were successful lawyers, teachers, secretaries, and machine operators. One blind Iowan graduated from a Georgetown University program and went on to work as a translator of Russian radio broadcasts and taped material for a government agency.

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It was clear that the VR program's objective was to assist blind persons in realizing their maximum potential of independence and self-support.

Throughout the early 1960s, the Iowa Commission for the Blind's job was to train a blind person in efficient skills, open opportunities through job placement, and conduct follow-up interviews on job placements in order to evaluate the success and iron out any concerns.

The 1960s continued to explode with employment breakthroughs. Iowa's program produced the world's first blind electrical engineer and the first blind person to be hired by the National Labor Relations Board in 1967. As computers became more enmeshed in Iowa's business industry, the first computer programmer in Iowa was hired in 1966.

The number of blind Iowans being served went up by 550% in 1966, and a record number of blind persons were working in 1968 when employment was up by 750%, compared to 1958. In addition, there was a record low of blind welfare recipients in 1968.

In 1970, the first blind man was hired as an insurance underwriter, and the

first blind Iowan was working in public health dentistry.

These employment opportunities were groundbreaking, but they still weren't enough to completely dispel misgivings held by the general public, particularly by employers. Many blind Iowans were still discriminated against based upon their blindness, not on their inability to do the same job as their sighted peers.

Unfortunately, even with proper training and confidence, the potential employee couldn't convince the employer to hire them. The employer often needed some added assurance, which was provided by the VR counselor.

The agency's VR counselor worked conjointly with the blind individual in finding employment and advocated for the hiring of the blind individual. The counselor would sit down with the potential employer and discuss any concerns. While this was not always effective, it's evident that it was successful enough to blaze a few trails.

The Iowa Department for the Blind continues to base its employment and training activities upon the ideas initiated in 1959.

The VR program was expanded over the years, continuously shaped by both

legislation and the advocacy efforts of blind and visually impaired Iowans.

Our country's economic and employment picture has fluctuated often over the past 50 years. Some decades have been easier than others, and all Americans are impacted, including those who happen to be blind.

While the vocational landscape may be changing, one thing remains the same. If a person who is blind truly wants to work, a job can be found.

The most important outcome of our VR program today is the difference it makes in the lives of blind Iowans. Each individual is unique and is reflected in the individual plan for employment. They are encouraged to explore their options and make a decision based on their choice.

If you, or someone you know, could benefit from our employment services, please submit a referral online at www.idbonline.org. Or you can call the Department at (800)362-2587. ♦

The Evolution of Audio Magazines

By Beth Hirst
Assistant Library Director

The Iowa Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped now offers all of its circulating magazines on digital cartridges. This exciting new format allows the reader to browse through a magazine easily, stopping on articles of interest while skipping past others. This simple act of navigation, akin to flipping through a print copy, has been difficult or non-existent in previous types of audio magazines. The new method of circulation is personalized and driven by each patron's reading habits. A look back at the history of magazine service for the blind illustrates how revolutionary the digital format is.

The National Library Service for the Blind (NLS) began producing talking books in 1934. The first "magazine" recorded on disc was *Talking Book Topics*, produced by the American Foundation for the Blind in 1939, and a subscription cost \$1.00 per year. In 1964, *Jack and Jill* was the first recorded children's magazine.

In the late 1960s, NLS experimented with light-weight, "flexible" discs. Library patrons greeted this change with enthusiasm. By 1971, all NLS talking magazines were produced on flexible discs.

The Iowa Library began working with volunteers to record textbooks and other materials on open reel tape shortly after the Library was established in 1960. One narrator has been volunteering continuously since 1963.

Once cassettes came on the scene, locally recorded magazines soon followed. Cassettes were easy to duplicate and to ship, and they could be reused several times before being recycled. By 1980, a library staff position was dedicated exclusively to magazine circulation and subscription management.

Through the mid-'80s, NLS was phasing out production of rigid discs and converting flexible discs to cassettes. At the same time, the Library began increasing the number of copies produced for each magazine issue, from six subscribers per copy, to three subscribers per copy, and finally to a copy for every subscribing patron. This drastically reduced the turn-around time for

each issue. Each patron received a personal copy without having to wait for others to finish reading it.

In 1996, the Iowa Department for the Blind and the Iowa Department of Corrections formed a new partnership to support the recording program at the Library. Located at the Iowa Medical and Classification Center



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at Oakdale, the Reading Assistance Program (RAP) included inmate narrators and an inmate duplication clerk.

Narrators recorded numerous magazines, textbooks, tutorials, and children's books. The clerk took over mass duplication projects, including all circulating magazines. Despite an occasional inmate problem, the RAP arrangement has been very successful.

By 2000, advances in digital recording foreshadowed the passing of the cassette era. NLS embarked on a long-term plan to develop a new medium that would play on a different kind of machine. The decision was made to pursue flash memory as the next audio format.

To prepare for the coming transition and to improve sound quality, the Library added a Digital Recording Specialist to the Recording Unit. An in-house studio opened in 2006, and recording equipment for home narrators was upgraded. Within two years, nearly all narrators had converted to digital recording, and the studio was regularly booked. Auditions were more stringent, quality improved immensely, and files were stored safely on a server. Files could be copied to cassettes, but were available to convert to the new medium when the time came. A second Recording Specialist came on board in 2008.

With the release of the NLS Digital Talking Book Machine and the new flash memory cartridges in 2009, the Recording Unit moved ahead with creating digital talking books from locally recorded materials. The process required formatting changes for the narrators, as well as mark-up for navigation, encryption of the material, and write-protection for the cartridges, handled by recording

staff.

In early 2011, a new process for providing locally circulated magazines on cartridges was studied and developed. The first title to be converted, Popular Science, was mailed to patrons in June. Response from readers was overwhelmingly positive, and the push to transfer all local magazines to cartridge was on. The Friends of the Library for the Blind provided funding for magazine cartridges and mailing containers. With the arrival of 2012, the transition has been completed.

The Iowa plan is unique in one major aspect. Cartridges are assigned to patrons, instead of to magazine issues. A patron may subscribe to several titles. Rather than receiving new issues of each title in separate containers, the patron will get all the latest issues on her personal magazine cartridge. When she has finished reading these issues, she returns the single cartridge, which is erased and loaded with whatever new issues are now available. If none have arrived yet, the cartridge is stored. One of the many features of the specially designed magazine application alerts library staff when new issues have come in for that patron.

With 36 magazine titles in circulation to roughly 1000 borrowers, this one cartridge per patron plan will save thousands of dollars in cartridges and mailing containers. The plan also allows for more timely delivery. Patrons are encouraged to return their magazine cartridges regularly to keep their issues flowing.

Library patrons, if you have not tried digital magazines, choose a few from our list of titles and find out what a satisfying reading experience they can provide! ♦

BOOKLIST

Following is the list of magazines now available in digital format. If you would like to subscribe to any of these titles, please call or e-mail your reader advisor: 800-362-2587 or library@blind.state.ia.us.

AARP: THE MAGAZINE (bimonthly). Subjects of interest to people fifty and older.

ANNALS OF IOWA (quarterly). In-depth essays on Iowa life and history. Includes reviews of recent publications of historical scholarship.

ARIZONA HIGHWAYS (monthly). Arizona travel, history, and art.

BETTER HOMES AND GARDENS (monthly). Home decorating, gardening, food, health, family issues.

BIRDS AND BLOOMS (bimonthly). Covers home gardening, bird watching and feeding, and other nature topics.

CAPPER'S (monthly). Informal information of interest to rural readers.

COUNTRY WOMAN (bimonthly). For farm women and those whose hearts are still in the country. Includes recipes, decorating, and crafts.

ESQUIRE (monthly). "Man at His Best." Women, cars, entertainment, current issues.

GOOD OLD DAYS (bimonthly). Nostalgic stories, letters, poems, and reminiscences written by older Americans about "the happy days gone by."

GUIDEPOSTS (monthly). Inspirational interviews, stories, and poems. Interfaith.

HEALTH NEWS COMBO (MONTHLY). INCLUDES BERKELEY WELLNESS LETTER, HARVARD HEALTH NEWSLETTER, TUFTS HEALTH LETTER, AND DUKE MEDICINE HEALTH NEWS.

From the Librarian

In 2007, Jason Roberts, author of "A Sense of the World: How a Blind Man Became History's Greatest Traveler,"



presented the keynote speech at the Library's annual volunteer luncheon. Roberts' admiration for James Holman, the subject of his biography, was evident in his speech. It's easy to see why he felt so strongly: Holman's independent spirit resonates with all who would live free lives.

Holman may have relied on his hearing ability by using a simple walking stick for echolocation. He made a click with the end of his cane to learn what was around him. However, I believe Holman's will made him "...History's Greatest Traveler." The cane was an extension of his will.

The great American alpinist, Erik Weihenmayer, too, uses a cane to climb the world's highest peaks and scale some of the world's most demanding rock walls. Again, it's not the tools that get Erik to summits. It's his will. A will to be who you are supposed to be, no matter the obstacles; knowing your desires, establishing goals that align with those desires, and then doing, even enduring, anything necessary to achieve those goals.

Weihenmayer's book, "Touch the Top of the World..." and the long white cane, both illustrate this tenacious will and strong spirit of independence. And it is just that will which makes all the difference.

*Sincerely,
Randy Landgrebe*

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IOWA HERITAGE ILLUSTRATED (QUARTERLY). HISTORY OF IOWA PEOPLE, PLACES, AND EVENTS FOR GENERAL AUDIENCE, PUBLISHED BY THE STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF IOWA.

THE IOWA LION (10 ISSUES/YEAR). OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE LIONS CLUBS OF IOWA. DISTRICT NEWS AND CONVENTION INFORMATION.

THE IOWAN (BIMONTHLY). IOWA PEOPLE, PLACES, HISTORY, AND CULTURE.

LOOKING BACK (BIMONTHLY). NOSTALGIC STORIES OF “THE HAPPY DAYS GONE BY”, CONTRIBUTED BY READERS. SIMILAR TO GOOD OLD DAYS.

JOURNAL OF REHABILITATION (IRREGULAR). PUBLISHED BY NATIONAL REHABILITATION ASSOCIATION FOR PROFESSIONALS IN THE FIELD OF VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION.

NATURAL HEALTH (9 ISSUES/YEAR). HEALTH AND WELLNESS, HEALING FOODS AND RECIPES, HOLISTIC FITNESS, INTERCONNECTEDNESS OF MIND, BODY, AND SPIRIT.

NATURAL SOLUTIONS (9 ISSUES/YEAR). COMPLEMENTARY AND ALTERNATIVE MEDICINE, NATURAL REMEDIES, PRACTICAL STRATEGIES FOR SELF-CARE AND PREVENTION.

ORGANIC GARDENING (BIMONTHLY). ORGANIC METHODS OF GARDENING.

PARENTS MAGAZINE (MONTHLY). INFORMATION ON RAISING CHILDREN FROM CRIB TO COLLEGE.

PLAYBOY (MONTHLY). FICTION, INTERVIEWS, AND ARTICLES FROM A MALE PERSPECTIVE.

POETRY (MONTHLY). CONTEMPORARY POETRY FEATURING A WIDE RANGE OF STYLES.

POPULAR SCIENCE (MONTHLY). LATEST TRENDS, PRODUCTS, AND PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS IN SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY.

REDBOOK (MONTHLY). SHORT STORIES, FASHION, CRAFTS, AND HOME MANAGEMENT.

REMINISCE (BIMONTHLY). NOSTALGIC STORIES AND MEMORIES OF THE EARLY TO MID-20TH CENTURY.

RETIREMENT LIFE (MONTHLY). PUBLICATION OF THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF RETIRED FEDERAL EMPLOYEES (NARFE). LEGISLATIVE DEVELOPMENTS, RETIREMENT ISSUES, ASSOCIATION NEWS.

SATURDAY EVENING POST (BIMONTHLY). FEATURES, BOOKS, OPINION, HUMOR, PERSONALITIES, HEALTH AND FITNESS, FOOD AND RECIPES.

SEVENTEEN (MONTHLY). FASHION, HAIR, MAKE-UP, MUSIC, MOVIES, ADVICE FOR TEENS AND YOUNG ADULT WOMEN.

SMITHSONIAN (MONTHLY). SCIENCE, NATURAL HISTORY, ART, ARCHAEOLOGY, HISTORY, AND ECOLOGY AS WELL AS MUSEUM EVENTS.

TASTE OF HOME (BIMONTHLY). RECIPES, DECORATING, MENUS FOR ENTERTAINING AND SEASONAL EVENTS.

TIME MAGAZINE (WEEKLY). NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL NEWS AND FEATURES.

Legacy of the Long White Cane

By Rebecca Swainey
Braille Teacher

Many blind Iowans have learned to travel with the long white cane during their training in the Adult Orientation and Adjustment Center of the Iowa Department for the Blind. Others have received instruction from rehabilitation teachers who first learned the techniques for travel with the Iowa cane through on-the-job training in the Center.

Through travel, and other classes, students developed alternative skills and techniques, and the self-confidence to go out into the world. The belief that they could attend college, obtain the degree of their choice, and compete for jobs on an equal basis with their sighted peers often began with their first tentative steps with a cane.

But it was not always that way. In its initial form the Iowa Commission for the Blind was a very custodial agency with limited expectations for the people it served. The idea that blind people, even as adults, would have the ability to move about independent of others beyond their own homes was unthinkable. That this might lead to a desire for advanced education and expectations of employment was inconceivable. Then a series of seemingly unrelated events occurred to change everything.

Following World War II the Veteran's Administration developed a long, white cane, called the Hoover cane, after its creator Richard E. Hoover. In these hospital-like settings the technique came to be known simply as "travel". The idea that a long cane could be used as an extension of an individual, to essentially act as one's eyes, rather than simply providing orthopedic support made a great deal of sense and was soon taken up by a number of civilian agencies.

Meanwhile an organized movement of the



Orientation Center students learn how to cross water using the long, white cane.

blind was growing led by a professor in California named Jacobus tenBroek. An early advocate of programs which provided blind persons with comprehensive training in the techniques of blindness, tenBroek understood that this process need not be overly complicated. Blind, and yet highly mobile himself long before the creation of the long white cane, he understood its value, but he also understood its place.

TenBroek and his followers believed that the problems of blind people came not so much from the physical loss of sight as from the misconceptions society as a whole held about blindness. They believed what was needed was a training center based on this concept and prepared to address these issues while providing training in skills and techniques of blindness.

In the late 1950s the Commission was in need of a director. They had no training cen-

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ter and were at the absolute bottom for services provided to the blind of the state. It was the perfect opportunity. Kenneth Jernigan, a member of tenBroek's organization, applied for and got the position. His intent was to change things around as rapidly as possible. A major component of his plan was to create the training center he and his cohorts had envisioned.

Mr. Jernigan was impressed with a young, sighted history teacher he met named L. James Witte, and offered him the travel instructor's position. Later Witte would say he had no idea what that

meant. His first impression was that he was being asked to be a chauffeur. He soon learned what Mr. Jernigan meant when he was sent to California where he learned to walk with a long, white cane. He became proficient and was soon a leader in the field of mobility for the blind.

Witte understood the importance of an independent means of mobility but also understood that alone was not the answer to success. In his 1985 monograph on Travel With the Long White Cane he wrote, "Skills and techniques of blindness should be taught and viewed as means to an end, not as ends in and of

themselves."

Iowa's program quickly became known for producing confident, independent travelers able to get about in any environment in areas both known and unknown. The program became so prominent and respected that a version of the long, white cane came to be known as the Iowa Cane.

Current students in the Center continue to navigate city streets, catch public transportation, and hike country trails all with the same goal as those who came before; to become competent, independent travelers in charge of their own destinations. ♦

Curious...

about the Orientation Center
or any of the
Iowa Department for the Blind's
programs?

Take a tour!

We offer free tours of our historic
building and an inside look at our
programs and services.

Call 515-281-1333
to schedule a tour.



Out For A Hike

This fall Orientation Center students and staff traveled to Sugar Creek in Ferryville, WI for camping and hiking. Students were able to have some fun, but also learned how to apply their travel skills in a rural setting.

Photo by Dave Hauge.

Transition: Preparing for a Successful Future

Services for blind youth in Iowa were traditionally provided by the Iowa Braille and Sight Saving School; however, the Iowa Department for the Blind recognized it also needed to begin actively reaching out to the youth. In 2002, the Department's Transition Program offered services specifically tailored to youth dealing with blindness or visual impairment. Transition programs are a recent addition, but the heart of the program has a longer history.

The Department has provided services to blind and visually impaired Iowans for over 85 years. The focus has always been on teaching alternative skills and techniques in order to develop self-confidence, and helping blind Iowans find successful employment. The Transition Program built off this strong foundation.

Transition programs target blind youth, and help them develop the independence required to take charge of their own lives. Keri Osterhaus, Transition Specialist, said the driving force behind the Transition Program is, "We want our youth to be successful and competent and ready to be leaders in their communities."

During the first year, activities included three different summer programs,

and two weekend retreats. Over the years temporary programs have also been offered. For example, Pathfinders, a Transition mentoring program, matched young adults with successful blind adults, in order to provide positive blind role models and encourage the pursuit of job training and employment.

Currently, the programs include weekend retreats and summer camps. Through these activities, students realize that they are not the only ones dealing with blindness. These programs offer an opportunity to develop a network of support, learn blindness techniques and build confidence. Keri Osterhaus says, "As a result of these programs, students raise their expectations about their life, their future, and in general, about the things they can accomplish and achieve, as well as learn the skills they need in order to be successful in life."

The Transition programs are just one branch of the Department's Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) services. The VR services are



One group of Transition students took a trip to Yellowstone National Park. The picture above shows students using their travel skills during a hike.

specifically designed to offer support in preparing for, obtaining, and retaining employment. At age fourteen, students who are blind or severely visually impaired should become acquainted with their VR counselor and begin participating in the Department's Transition programs.

Also around age fourteen, the VR counselor and student should start the application process for VR services. Students should continue to work closely with their VR counselors and the Transition staff throughout their remaining high school years to develop an employment goal and ensure that they are receiving the training and opportunities essential for them to reach that goal. ♦

A Look Back on the Origins of Iowa BEP

By Roger Erpelding
BEP Program Administrator

When the Randolph-Sheppard Act was passed in 1936, it marked a giant step forward for self-employment of blind persons. It didn't begin with the cafeterias, military dining, vending routes, and roadside facilities we have today. It all started small with what were known as "lobby stands." These "stands" were located in many federal facilities—at post offices in particular. They were small spaces, where a blind person handed items over a counter to the customer. The product list was quite limited, and at first these were "dry stands." Potato chips, candy bars, and cigarettes were some of the products sold.

The next step in this process was the "wet stand." The product line was increased to include liquid items, as the name implies—soda, coffee, juice, and milk.

As one might expect, these small businesses also were part of Iowa's early Randolph-Sheppard program. Although the early managers are all deceased, several operators remember management of these small locations. Not only did they occur at federal locations, but



One of the first small-business employment ventures available to the blind were "lobby stands" (pictured above). These stands sold dry goods only: candy bars, cigarettes, etc.; but opportunities soon expanded.

instances are known of such "stands" in private buildings.

Although it had been 32 years since its inception, Dorothy Nemmers first heard of the Randolph-Sheppard program when she was a student at the Department's Orientation Center in 1968. A few years after her return to her home in Sioux City, she became part of the program. At that time we had two facilities in the downtown Sioux City area—a "lobby stand" in the post office, and a small cafeteria in the basement of the Woodbury County Court House. Mrs. Nemmers was involved in both facilities. She managed the post office location from March of 1973

through November of that same year. When a vacancy occurred at the cafeteria, she became its manager from December 1973 until March of 1976. At that time she chose a short hiatus from the program.

By late in 1976, the post office stand again needed a manager. No one was readily available, so Mrs. Nemmers again managed it for about six months until a new person was trained for its operation. "We made good money, we made good managers, and the customers were friendly." And since the contact between managers and customers was so close and direct, Mrs. Nemmers related that,

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"We were friendly, too." This location was closed in 1980, and transferred to a small vending location in the basement. The building became the Federal Court House, and this vending area is now a part of a large vending route.

Mavis McVeety managed the main Des Moines post office lobby location from 1974-81. The location was closed in 1984. When the United States Postal Service published new internal regulations in the 1980's, they made lobby locations a thing of the past. They were replaced with banks of vending machines, snack bars, or cafeterias.

Mavis stocked and served a variety of merchandise at this small space. These included candy, pastries, sandwiches, bottled pop, gum, cigarettes, and coffee. Besides the food items, Mavis also offered notions. "I didn't make much money, but I had direct competition from vending machines and a cafeteria upstairs, so I received money from them as well," she explained.

The main post office is now home to several banks of vending machines, as well as a snack bar in the lunch room. Under its current make up, it is definitely a profitable facility for the current blind manager.

In the early 1970's, a number of large private build-

ings also had "food stands" in their lobby. One of these, located at Banker's Trust in Des Moines, was managed by Joseph Van Lent. It was a small square location, where you could quite literally reach in all four directions and meet many of the customer's requests for products.

Mr. Van Lent sold bottled pop, sandwiches, cigarettes, potato chips, candy, and

“That’s progress--from little square boxes to large facilities; from serving only a few...to thousands of customers.”

milk--just to name a few. This area was between two sets of revolving doors. To further diminish the available space, the south wall had a door that led into the vestibule. Since the door turned inward, most of the adjoining wall was unusable. The space was maximized by placing candy, chip, and cigarette racks on the counter.

When Mr. Van Lent began to manage the location in 1971, profit was \$100 per month. When he left the location to manage the Polk County Court House Cafeteria in the fall of 1972, the profit was \$700 per month. Shortly after he left, the location

again became unprofitable, it was closed, and subsequently the building was torn down. "We had a lot of competition in the area," Mr. Van Lent stated, "There was a similar location across the street that sold sandwiches and candy, plus another place in the area that sold what I did." These two neighboring locations were not operated by blind persons.

That's progress--from little square boxes to large facilities; from serving only a few customers who happen to pass by to thousands of customers served in a large cafeteria, vending route, or roadside rest area. And everyone

has benefitted--the building managers, the building employees, the external customers, and most importantly the blind folks who profit from the operation of these facilities. ♦

For more information about Iowa BEP and available opportunities, please contact Roger Erpelding at (515) 281-1358 or in Iowa call (800) 362-2587.

Talking Tech

w/ Curtis Chong

Searching for Independence Through Technology

Historically, no technology has succeeded in replacing the cane or the guide dog as the principle tool of independent travel by someone who is blind. While no one can say with any assurance why this is the case, there is little doubt that over the past forty years, some interesting devices and gadgets have been created.

The laser cane is one technology that has been developed to modify a cane to alert the blind traveler to overhead obstacles or steps. An early version of the laser cane would emit infrared laser beams in front of the blind traveler to detect drop offs and overhead obstacles, and it would emit different tones or activate certain vibrators under the fingers when something was detected by the reflected beams. The one laser cane that I did examine in the mid 1970's cost about \$3,000, and the technology was integral to the cane. If the cane broke, a person would lose everything--the cane and the technology that went with it. Since that time, I have never met a blind person using anything like the laser cane.

The Sonic Pathfinder and the SonicGuide are two examples of technologies that were developed for the blind traveler which provide information about the distance and direction of any obstacle detected. These devices are worn on the traveler's head and contain a number of transmitters and receivers that feed information to a microcomputer.

Ultrasonic echoes are processed, and audio information is provided through earpieces which the blind traveler wears while walking. I myself had a chance to work with the SonicGuide in the mid 1970's. Essentially, the SonicGuide was packaged in a pair of spectacles, and this was connected to a computer which was clipped to the belt. While I found the SonicGuide to be very good at helping me to locate tree branches and other overhead obstacles, I found that listening to the

SonicGuide tended to distract my attention away from the immediate environment. Also, I still needed to use my cane. I suspect that this, combined with the hefty price tag (two to three thousand dollars), significantly lessened the appeal of

these electronic travel technologies.

Of all the technologies that have been applied to the business of independent travel by the blind, GPS technology seems to have been the most widely adopted, despite its relatively high cost as compared to the cane. While GPS technology can in no way replace the cane, it does provide useful information that the cane cannot. For instance, it can tell a person's direction of travel; the name of the street where a traveler is walking; the distance and direction to reach the nearest intersection; and the addresses of nearby restaurants, business establishments, or other points of interest. While riding the bus, the blind traveler can use GPS technology to find out what streets are nearby.

The very first GPS system for the blind that I recall was developed back in the early 1990's by a company called Arkenstone. It was called the Talking Atlas, and you had to carry both a laptop computer and a GPS receiver while

While GPS technology can in no way replace the cane, it does provide useful information that the cane cannot.



By Linda Slayton

Who is your best friend and why are they your best friend? The answer to that question is different for each of us. Usually it lies in the traits that a friend possesses or in the bonds of trust we have created over time. Sometimes it is a more undefined answer such as, "I just don't know what I'd do without her." Whatever our reasoning, our friendship exists because, on some level, there is mutual support between us.



My friendship with my white cane developed slowly. My home teacher brought my cane to me when I first became connected with the Department for the Blind. Then my cane came with me to the orientation center and it was there that we were forced to bond. I say forced because I wasn't very excited to be blind or to use a cane.

Of course, during that time, other students were also bonding with their canes. Most of us pretended to have no need, want, or desire to be friends with a lowly cane. No, indeed, they were not canes at all (except maybe during class time). Instead, they were fish-

ing poles, light sabers, javelins, dance props, pokers, stick ponies, and people-movers. They were anything but a way to identify us as blind folks and anything but a tool we actually needed because we were blind. Fortunately, we would learn differently.

The real bonding between my cane and me began during travel. Travel was the place I felt most vulnerable. With sleep shades I felt like a super hero who loses their super power. My usable vision had been my power and it was gone. I was out in the big world with traffic villains coming at me from every direction. My options

When I hear the tapping of someone's cane, I instantly recognize a kindred spirit.

were simple and few. I could go slow, steady and carry a big stick or I could die. Meet Captain Cane-Man! Sheepishly, I must confess that this scenario happened on home block. I must also add that I never became Captain Cane-Man, but I did achieve a fairly acceptable Citizen Cane.

For those of you who know me, you also know I do not always carry my cane. If I am using a cane, it is usually my white support cane. That doesn't mean I have given up on our friendship. Like any friendship it has evolved over time. We are there for one another when needed and always will be.

The development of new technologies such as GPS makes me wonder if the long white cane will someday be obsolete. I hope not. Just as we connect personally to our canes, our canes connect us in personal ways to each other. When I hear the tapping of someone's cane, I instantly recognize a kindred spirit. That sound alerts me that someone is near who shares a common ground of obstacles, successes, frustrations, and victories. Whether I speak with that person or not, the sound alone connects me to another

with a feeling of support and unity. It too is a sort of friendship for me. Our white canes may tell others we are blind, but they tell us we are a blind community. ♦

Linda Slayton is a freelance writer living in Des Moines. She can be reached by e-mail at lcslayton@yahoo.com

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VITAL SPEECHES OF THE DAY (MONTHLY). SELECTION OF SPEECHES MADE BY LEADERS OF GOVERNMENT, INDUSTRY, EDUCATION AND OTHER ARENAS. PUBLICATION IS RECORDED BY NARRATORS, NOT THE SPEECHMAKERS THEMSELVES.

WALLACE'S FARMER (MONTHLY). IOWA-BASED FARMING MAGAZINE.

WHITE CANE (QUARTERLY). OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE IOWA DEPARTMENT FOR THE BLIND.

WILD WEST (BIMONTHLY). HISTORY, CULTURE, ART, AND PERSONALITIES OF THE OLD WEST.

WOMAN'S DAY (MONTHLY). BEAUTY, SHOPPING, COOKING, CRAFTS, FAMILY. ◆

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traveling. Since then, GPS technology has been incorporated into cell phones, note-takers used by the blind, and hand-held GPS systems designed specifically for the blind.

The perfect technology supporting independent travel for the blind has yet to be created. However, over the years, there has been some forward movement in this area, and there is every possibility that research and development in this area will continue. ◆

Commission Board Meeting Packets

Commission Board meeting packets are available to the public, upon request, before the scheduled meeting date. Packets are available in Braille, large print and electronic formats. If you would like to receive this information, please contact Tiffany Bickell at (515)281-1336, or email Tiffany.Bickell@blind.state.ia.us.

NOTES

Director

Karen Keninger

karen.keninger@blind.state.ia.us

Deputy Director

Bruce Snethen

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Commission for the Blind

Next meeting: TBA

Mike Hoenig, commission chair

Steve Hagemoser, member

Peggy Elliott, member

Mission:

The Iowa Department for the Blind is the means for persons who are blind to obtain for themselves universal accessibility and full participation in society in whatever roles they may choose, including roles that improve Iowa's economic growth.

- We would love to come speak about blindness at your club or organization's next meeting.
- We also provide training workshops on blindness at your school or office.
- If you've never seen our building and want to learn more about our services and what we provide in our building, we'd love to give you a tour.

Email us at information@blind.state.ia.us or call us at (800) 362-2587 for more information.

UPCOMING EVENTS

January 20

IL Advisory Committee Meeting

Director's Conference Room

Iowa Department for the Blind

The Independent Living (IL) Advisory Committee meets to discuss details about the IL program, such as policies and program development. The Committee also helps promote IDB services in their area. Members are individuals with disabilities or parents/guardians of individuals with disabilities. The number of members is unlimited, and each term served is 2 years. For more information, contact the IL program at (800) 362-2587.

February 25

Iowa Braille Challenge

Iowa Department for the Blind

Students from Iowa in grades 1-12 will compete in a series of five skills contests demonstrating braille reading and comprehension, speed and accuracy, spelling, proofreading, and tactile graphics. This event will be co-hosted by Iowa Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped and Iowa Braille School. The Braille Challenge is a nationwide competition. To learn more, visit The Braille Challenge website at www.braillechallenge.org.

More upcoming events and details at
www.idbonline.org/news

Iowa Dept. for the Blind
524 Fourth St.
Des Moines, IA 50309

FREE MATTER FOR THE BLIND

COMING SOON TO A LIBRARY NEAR YOU

Ever wondered how blindness impacts a person's ability to learn and work? Or is blindness a disability? Find answers to these questions and more in the History of Blindness in Iowa traveling exhibit. Listen to personal stories shared by Iowans affected by blindness, and discover how Iowa has been a leader in advocating for the rights of the blind.

Check the schedule for a library near you!

January - Des Moines (East Side) Public Library

February - Perry Public Library

March - Lake Park Public Library

April - Council Bluffs Public Library

May - Iowa City Public Library

June - Denver Public Library

For more information on the traveling exhibit, and to view a complete schedule, please visit the History of Blindness in Iowa website at www.iowablindhistory.org